



The Klamath Wildlife Refuge Amendment to the 2004 Interior Appropriations Bill

Reps. Blumenauer, Thompson, and Shays

For the past century, the Federal Government has been unable to honor its commitments in the Klamath Basin to farmers, wildlife, fish, and Native Americans. The Lower Klamath and Tule Lake wildlife refuges are an example of the conflicting priorities of reclamation of wetlands for agriculture and the preservation of wetlands for wildlife.

The Klamath Basin

The Klamath River Basin is located in Southern Oregon and Northern California. It has been compared to Florida's Everglades for its importance to fish and wildlife. The Basin hosts 80 percent of the waterfowl in the Pacific flyway, and is home to the greatest concentration of wintering bald eagles in the continental United States. The Lower Klamath Wildlife Refuge was established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 as the nation's first waterfowl refuge.

Problem:

- Management practices employed on the Klamath Basin Wildlife Refuges have reduced historic wetlands and wildlife habitat by more than 75% and are considered by some to be contrary to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, passed overwhelmingly by Congress in 1997 (407-1). The Act clarified that wildlife conservation is the singular mission of national wildlife refuges. Commercial farming on the Klamath Basin wildlife refuges uses scarce water resources as well as causes habitat degradation and water pollution. Klamath Basin refuges are the only refuges in the country that allow agriculture for purely commercial purposes.
- Last year's record die-off of more than 33,000 fish in the Klamath River, which many believe was due to low water levels, further demonstrates the ecological disaster in the basin.
- The most damaging crops on the refuge are alfalfa and row crops, such as onions, potatoes, and sugar beets, which are water intensive during the dry summer months. These crops provide little benefit to wildlife. In past years, refuge marshes have gone dry for lack of water even as crops on the refuges continued to receive irrigation.

Solution:

- In order to preserve the integrity of the National Wildlife refuge system and the ecology of the Klamath basin, farming on the Klamath Basin refuges should be consistent with farming in the rest of the refuge system.
- The Blumenauer-Thompson-Shays amendment would require farm leases that the Fish and Wildlife System enters into next year to grow only crops that are beneficial to wildlife, such as wheat and grains. These crops also use fewer pesticides and less water. The amendment would only apply to leases that expire in October 2003.

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